[As sent by Grant Balfour to Steven Wintle on April 25, 2003]

Shifter2: Spores of Doom!
Notes to Artist: Mostly, this is written to conform to a nine-panel grid. I make some suggestions, but play whatever layout games you like. Quite often, it seems like it'd work best if the frames weren't perfectly square, with some bigger or smaller than their neighbors. Whatever you think is fun.

If it's dialogue and it's in ALL CAPS, that just means the word should be emphasized however you like. If it's ALL CAPS in a description, that means it's something that becomes important in the story later on.

Visual-wise, this is your story to tell. But while writing it, the pictures in my head were from the early 20th century - Edgar Rice Burroughs, Little Nemo comics, Wizard of Oz stuff. Possible reference pics:
* Wizard of Oz pix: http://www.oz-central.com/photo.html , especially http://www.oz-central.com/bow02.html, and http://seamonkey.ed.asu.edu/oz/Birthday.gif
* Winsor McCay pix: http://comic-art.net/images/nemo.jpg , and http://www.top100comics.de/images/leseproben/56_3.jpg - follow the links
* Moneran pix: scientific diagram - http://www.bio-logia.com.ar/Monera.htm, the awesome majesty of Ernst Haeckel - http://www.seniorentreff.de/grusskarten/haeckel/Seiten/Tafel_017.htm and http://caliban.mpiz-koeln.mpg.de/~stueber/haeckel/insulinde/figures.html (browse around those sites - Haeckel rocks!)

Page One, Frame 1: A tangled jungle, vines, trees. Perhaps a bird flyingby.

Caption: The heart of the Arinaca Jungle, the greatest wilderness on this Earth...

F2: A continuation of the previous frame. The trees are slightly less dense, more sky is visible.

Caption: ...the subject of grim rumors and dark whispers...

F3: Continuation of previous frame. Jenny Everywhere is walking through a jungle path, her scarf jauntily flying over a backpack, a long branch serving as WALKING STICK. Even though the trees are thinning, she is still dwarfed by them.

Caption: ...tales of mysterious creatures and unknown lands...

F4: On Jenny. She sits, tired, unscrewing the cap of her canteen. Her shoes are visible, and are rather BADLY WORN.

JENNY
All this walking makes my feet hurt.

I've got to get some better sneakers.

F5: Jenny's POV - a shadowy figure, about six feet tall with huge glowing eyes, lurches toward her in the undergrowth.

JENNY
...It can't be too much farther now.

SHADOW
Grruk!

F6: On Jenny. She's startled, the canteen almost at her lips.

F7: Jenny recovers, gives an annoyed smirk.

JENNY
There's always one more twist in the trail, isn't there. Yeah, yeah.

F8: Two shot, with a low-hanging branch framing the top of the panel. To the left, Jenny rises to her feet. To the right, the shadowy figure extends a cruel, three-clawed hand into the frame, followed by its rather large, round face.

SHADOW
Ch-rrrrrrrk!

JENNY
The Great Mushroom Forest? That way? Thanks!

F9: Same perspective. Jenny is walking away from us, and the shadowy creature has emerged into view. It's actually a small sloth, suspended at eye level from the low-hanging branch.

Caption: ...a zone from which few adventurers ever return!

Page Two, F1-F3: One large panel, perhaps, showing Jenny emerging from the jungle onto a treeless bluff, stunned by the tableau below her.

JENNY
Oh! COOL!

F4-F9: I'd love it if this splash was done by Winsor McCay. I suppose it wouldn't have to be separated from the above panel, depending on how you do

it. It depicts a large, rolling valley consumed by a vast forest of polka-dotted mushrooms. Although varied, they're all the size of trees, and arrayed in almost geometrical precision. If you've ever seen the story where Little Nemo goes to Mars, I think there's a similar image there.

Title: Spores of Doom!
Credits: Words by Grant Balfour, Pictures by....

Page Three, Frames 1-6: (These frames can be separated into three tall panels, or combined into one big panel.) Jenny strides with awe through the colossal fungi. There's definitely the sense she's on a road or pathway. The fungi ranges in size from four feet to 15 feet in height, with some 40 foot giants in the distance. The undergrowth is mostly giant mosses and tree lichens - no leafy plants at all.

Caption: Yes, the Great Mushroom Forest!

Caption: Dire are the tales told of its SHADOWED EXPANSE! Many are the legends describing its UNCANNY CREATURES and weird denizens!

Caption: And even... unimaginable TREASURES?

Caption: But Jenny Everywhere seeks no worldly reward, only ADVENTURE!

F7: As Jenny walks onward, she encounters someone...

JENNY
What's this?

F8: ...Someone round, about three feet tall, with fingers, nose, long hair and beard like stringy carrots or roots. He's the Old Shepherd, and he's staring up towards Jenny. I'm thinking this aged creature should resemble a fibrous, sleepy-eyed version of the Nome King from the J Neill illustrations of the Wizard of Oz books. If you haven't seen him, picture a cross between a kewpie doll, a turnip, and an Ent.

OLD SHEPHERD
I'm not a what. I'm a who.

JENNY
Who?

F9: On the Old Shepherd. It's clearer now how Jenny could mistake him for a puffball fungus.

OLD SHEPHERD
I'm a fungal shepherd. THE fungal shepherd, actually.
What're you doing in my flock?

Page Four, F1: Two-shot of Jenny and the Old Shepherd.

OLD SHEPHERD
You're not a wolf, are you?

JENNY
A wolf?

F2: The Old Shepherd turns, gesturing for Jenny to follow.

OLD SHEPHERD
We've been having GROWING problems lately. C'mon.

F3: They emerge into a wide clearing, with some unusually shaped mushrooms around them.

JENNY
I didn't think there were any animals in the Great Mushroom Forest.

F4: The Old Shepherd gestures Jenny onto a low, table-shaped toadstool.

OLD SHEPHERD
Animals? Nope. These're moneran wolves. Sit still.

F5: The Old Shepherd, standing on a boulder or low mushroom, makes a cylinder out of his hand (not quite a fist) and listens to Jenny's chest, like a doctor using a stethoscope.

OLD SHEPHERD
Good, good. Yeah, monerans. Neither plant nor animal. Nor fungus.

F6: The Old Shepherd has opened Jenny's mouth and is peering skeptically down her throat. She's a little bewildered.

OLD SHEPHERD
Now, cough.

F7: The Old Shepherd helps her off the toadstool table.

OLD SHEPHERD
You'll do.

JENNY
Do what?

F8: Two shot of Jenny & the Old Shepherd. He's looking up at her like she's a little slow.

F9: Identical frame, only now the Old Shepherd's pointing into the distance.

OLD SHEPHERD
Get them wolves.

Page Five, F1-3: A long shot of the mushroom forest. In the distance, a trio of colossal, blob-like creatures are approaching. They're easily 30 feet tall, and resemble paramecia or bacteria. Each one can look radically different, or much the same, your choice. Their floating nuclei give them a vaguely face-like construction, and there's a DISTINCTIVE PATTERN on their transparent outer membranes. In the foreground, a miniscule Jenny reacts in shock and horror, while an even more miniscule Old Shepherd leaps into the air, still pointing.

OLD SHEPHERD
You're animal! Natural enemy of moneran!
They're killing my flock!

F4: On Jenny's face, torn between surprise and resolution.

JENNY
They're so... HUGE.

F5-6: Medium shot of Jenny, steeling herself for battle, brandishing her walking stick.

Caption: Lesser beings would quake in fear... but the HEROINE of INFINITE DIMENSIONS lives only for ADVENTURE!

JENNY
And they're crushing the mushrooms!

F7: The monerans advance, glopping everything in their path.

F8: Jenny rushes forward, holding her staff like a javelin thrower... or pole vaulter.

F9: With a moneran filling the sky before her, she plants the end of the pole in the dirt...

Page Six, F1: ...she gracefully vaults up onto one massive, single-celled monster, her scarf unwinding in the breeze...

F2-3: ...and lands with a splat! on top of it. She's already looping her scarf around a hump at the top of the creature...

F4: ...like the bridle on a horse. She digs her heels in, cowgirl style.

JENNY
Hee-YAH!

F5: Medium-wide shot. The creature rears up like a rodeo bull, its hump growing longer, pseudopod style.

F6: Close on Jenny and the hump - now transforming into a mouth, reaching towards her.

JENNY
YIKES!

F7: Glorp! Jenny is swallowed by the moneran. We see her distorted, through the creature's transparent body, as if under moving gelatin.

F8: Medium shot of the moneran's body. Jenny, looking really cranky, floats downward, past the unlucky Old Shepherd, who also got glorped. There are bubbles around their heads, of course, and Jenny's scarf is trailing up from her hand.

OLD SHEPHERD
Sorry. At least they'll digest us quickly.

F9: We're reached the bottom of the organism, and the visual distortion is so extreme, we can't quite make out Jenny & the Old Shepherd's bodies. They're being excreted out among the mushrooms with a "plooop!" and a big splash.

Page Seven, F1: A goggle- & scarf-clad mushroom sits there, inert. Beside

the Jenny-shroom is a mushroom with a marked resemblance to the Old Shepherd. Ranks of other mushrooms are visible in the background.

JENNY SHROOM
Well. THIS is interesting....

F2: Same as F1.

F3: Same as F1.

JENNY SHROOM
No. Not really.

F4: Wider shot of the mushroom jungle. The Jenny-shroom strains in place.

JENNY SHROOM
Can't... free... legs... roots... whatever...

F5 & 6: Panoramic shot looking down at Jenny shroom, an identical mushroom lost in a sea of identical mushrooms.

JENNY SHROOM
AAAAAAAAAAAAUUUUUUUUUGGGGGGHHHH!

F7: Same as F1.

JENNY SHROOM
OK, think! What would a MUSHROOM do to get out of this situation?

F8: The Old Shepherd mushroom leans toward her.

OLD SHEPHERD SHROOM
SHHH! Mushrooms don't talk.

F9: Jenny shroom twists on her stem to face him.

JENNY SHROOM
That's not helping!

OLD SHEPHERD SHROOM
Hey, I don't make up the rules.

Page Eight, F1: Wide shot. Inspiration strikes the Jenny-shroom!

JENNY SHROOM
Mushrooms!

F2: Same image.

JENNY SHROOM
They REPRODUCE!

F3: Zoom in. The Jenny-shroom begins to wither and die.

Caption: Yes! Using her unique dimension-shifting ability, Jenny Everywhere transmits herself into FUTURE GENERATIONS!

F4-6: Zoom into the Jenny-shroom's gill slits. Tiny, spherical spores are dropping out, drifting with the wind. Each one is a tiny, backpacked Jenny Everywhere clone, curled up into a ball. The wind is carrying them onto the same moneran who swallowed Jenny. As they land, they extend their limbs, swarming like ants over the huge blob.

Caption: Space? Time? The mysteries of life?

Caption: These are mere STEPPING STONES to The Shifter!

F7-8: On the Jenny Everywheres, each one pulling and poking at the moneran landscape beneath them.

JENNIES (each completing each other's sentence)
Their skin... it's so tough... so elastic...like RUBBER!

F9: Close-up on one Jenny's face as she strains fiercely against the DISTINCTIVELY PATTERNED membrane.

Page Nine, F1-2: Wide shot. Amid the battle, another Jenny is splorped under the membrane.

F3: Medium shot on one Jenny, struck by inspiration again.

JENNY
Hey, Jennies! Backpack! Pocketknife!

F4: Close up - Jenny's hand, opening a Swiss Army knife

F5-6: Various Jennies brandishing their pocketknives. Some use the regular blade, some the

corkscrew, some the awl, some the scissors - but all are stabbing at the moneran, which is starting to gush out in spots like protoplasmic oil wells.

F7: A wide shot of the moneran as it deflates.

JENNIES (all together)
Victory!

F8: Medium shot, on one particular Jenny. Barefoot, she's picking up a ragged piece of the rubbery, DISTINCTIVELY PATTERNED membrane and stretching it around one of her feet.

JENNY
And best of all....

F9: On Jenny's feet, now clad in new, surprisingly sporty footwear.

JENNY
New SNEAKERS!

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